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AUTHOR Gustafson, Mary; Sorgman, Margo
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ABSTRACT

A study compared perceptions of institutional climate among four categories of female education students at the University of Utah: traditional age students (age 24 and under) who are Latter Day Saints (Mormons) or non-Latter Day Saints (non-LDS); and older students (age 25 and over) who are LDS or non-LDS. It was hypothesized that older students would have a different set of needs and concerns and would express a greater degree of dissatisfaction with the institutional climate and that the older non-LDS students would be more outspoken and assertive about institutional climate. Eighty undergraduate female students filled out questionnaires, and study results indicated that returning female students face barriers of financial hardships and conflicts about personal issues. Few students reported a concern about faculty role models or faculty who discriminate against them because of age or sex. Returning students, regardless of religious affiliation, indicated a significantly higher degree of dissatisfaction with institutional climate, as was predicted. Assertiveness was not a factor in limiting or predicting expression of dissatisfaction with institutional climate, and in contrast to the hypothesis, LDS students were more assertive, regardless of age. Based on study subject needs, 10 recommendations for institutional change at the University of Utah are offered. (JMK)

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The Degree of Satisfaction With Institutional Climate As Perceived by Female Students in Teacher Education: an Exploratory Study

Mary Gustafson

and

Margo Sorgman

University of Utah

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Paper Presented at the First Annual Meeting
of the
Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association

October 13, 1983
Jackson Hole, Wyoming

The Degree of Satisfaction With Institutional Climate
as Perceived by Female Students
in Teacher Education: an Exploratory Study

Adrienne Rich, a feminist poet, suggests that simply asking "What is life like for women?" will create a new awareness of the situation of women in society. This study seeks to answer the question with respect to women students in higher education.

The observer traversing a typical college or university campus in 1999, will be struck by the fact that the student body is composed of more women than men and that students over twenty-four are the norm (Carnegie Council, 1980). These older female students have been variously labeled nontraditional (despite the fact that they outnumber traditional students), adult, returning or re-entry students. They are defined in the literature as students over the age of twenty-four whose higher education has been interrupted or delayed by family obligations, institutional barriers, financial concerns, or other reasons (Hall, 1982; Kasworm, 1980; Weinstein, 1980; and others).

As a result of these delays, students return to campus with perspectives that are different from their younger classmates. Additionally, their needs are often more complex, reflecting those of adults who have made the transition from their parents to the responsibilities of professional, wife, mother, or community volunteer.

One explanation for this influx of older female students is the economic reality facing women today. Despite the persistent myth that the majority of them fulfill domestic roles rather than professional ones, the reality is that women work on an average of thirty-four years of their lives. Additionally, there has been a 54 percent increase of the women today as heads of household and of those 63 percent have children under eighteen years of age. By the year 1990, it is estimated that three out of every four wives will work (Women's Re-entry Project, 1980).

The need for professional training becomes critical as women enter the marketplace, especially for those who have aspirations for positions with reasonable pay and some stature. This is especially true for minority women

who generally have educational attainment levels below the average and who are typcially found in low status and low income producing positions. For these women, education is seen as a prerequisite for any degree of mobility and security.

Older female students bring a maturity that is lacking in the younger student and have achieved independence from their parents, an obstacle for most younger classmates. However, older students lack the access to a family economic base that their asscciates have. This is compouded by the financial constraints posed by institutions which generally restrict funding to full-time study, a pattern of enrollment not characteristic of returning women. It is not surprising then, that a major barrier to the pursuit of their education is financal hardship.

The most damaging barrier noted is the prejudice of faculty and administrators against older female students who can suffer multiple discrimination when the age stereotype is coupled with race and socio-economic status. Kasworm (1980) noted that faculty hold expectations that older students are not as intellectually capable as their younger classmates. This contradicts the data on older female students which reveals higher GPA's than those of younger students.

On the University of Utah campus with an enrollment of approximately 24,000 students, of whom 42 percent are women, the female students attain ACT scores that are usually above the national mean in all categories, higher than males in English but below males in mathematics, social studies, and natural science. However a review of GPA's over a twenty-year period from 1962-1980 demonstrates that females consistently received higher grades than males.

Even where older female students move into traditional fields, such as education, there is often a latent hostility on the part of the faculty to admit them to graduate study in the belief that these women will serve only a brief professional life. A faculty member at the University of Utah exemplified this attitude in a comment that female students in a doctoral program were "menopausal women" just filling their time. A study conducted at the University of Utah by Arp (1978) found a similar perception of adult students among faculty in business and social and behavioral science. Some faculty described graduate study for females as a hobby or pastime of bored middle class housewives.

Arp (1978) found that male and female students held similar expectations of schooling as essential for job and monetary success in their

younger years. As students mature, females acknowledged the personal satisfactions that accrue from study and selected majors that were of interest rather than just to meet career requirements.

A review of the literature on the older female students suggests that they approximate the more ideal student. They tend to seek an education for enlightenment and intellectual development, as well as for career opportunities. Additionally they are predisposed to study and demonstrate consistent academic excellence. In fact, their views and orientation toward education approximate the liberal educationist's goals. As students, these returning women -- both Mormon and non-Mormon -- are more mature, bright and serious-minded. Their role in the classroom is often one of leadership, their academic performance outstanding. Yet, returning women encounter barriers, both institutional and personal, which limit their access to higher education.

The barriers relating to personal issues are often described as family resistance to full-time study, conflicts about child care, and guilt over choosing academic priorities rather than family ones. Despite the subtle changes in child-rearing practices, the major responsibility for children rests with women, be they in a two- or single-parent family. For Mormons (Latter Day Saints), the dominant cultural group on the University of Utah campus, this is a crucial issue. Many of these women are making a transition within the LDS culture and are extending their interests beyond the domestic role. Choosing a traditional female occupation such as teaching seems compatible with the primary role of family caretaker.

Institutional barriers to higher education for returning women range from a benign neglect of their special needs (flexible class scheduling, extended hours for campus services, child care, etc.) to admissions and financial aid policies which overtly discriminate. The climate of the institution for returning students is often harsh and inhospitable.

The purpose of this study was to compare perceptions of institutional climate among four categories of subjects, traditional age students (24 and under) who are LDS or non-LDS and older students (25 and over) who are LDS or non-LDS. It was hypothesized that older students would have a different set of needs and concerns and would express a greater degree of dissatisfaction with the institutional climate. It was also hypothesized that the older non-LDS students would be more outspoken and assertive, and that this assertiveness might, in turn, account for their greater expression of

dissatisfaction with the institutional climates of the University. The socialization of women in the LDS belief system tends to limit their critical review of authority. Returning students, and particularly returning LDS students, were hypothesized to have a more extensive extra curricular time commitment which would be reflected in their list of concerns.

Method

Subjects

Ss were 80 undergraduate female students who returned a questionnaire sent to all 350 undergraduate females in the University of Utah Graduate School of Education's teacher education programs in elementary and secondary education. Currently, 70 percent of the students in these programs are age 25 or older. The average age of the female undergraduate is 29, while the average age of the male undergraduate is 25.

Independent Variables

Age and Religion. Based on their responses on the demographic section of the questionnaire, the Ss were divided into two age categories: traditional age, 24 or under (N = 32); and returning student, age 25 or over (N = 48); and two categories of religion, LDS (N = 47); non-LDS (N = 33).

Assertiveness. A thirty item assertiveness measure using a five point response scale was included in the questionnaire. Each Ss responses were totaled to give an assertivenss score. This variable was considered as a moderator variable. The assertiveness measure was compiled from several sources (Butler, 1976; Lange and Jakubowski, 1976; and ochers) and used extensively in assertiveness training workshops.

Dependent Variables

Institutional Climate. The Institutional Self Study Guide provided an extensive inventory of institutional services and policies which affect women, particularly re-entry women. Forty-three items were selected and adapted to the University of Utah and included admissions policies, financial aid, the educational program, extra curricular activities, honors and awards, counseling and suppport services. Subjects checked "yes" to services she thought the institute provdided or "no" to those services she thought were not

available. This measure yielded two scores, a total of all "yes" responses and a total of all "no" responses.

No single office of the institution was found which could provide answers to all the questions, so we assumed that no student had an accurate accounting of which services were available. Therefore, the subject's score on this part of the questonnaire was taken to reflect her perception of what is available, and would reflect her general satisfaction ("yes" responses) or dissatisfaction ("no" responses) to the institutional climate.

Check List of Concerns. A list of general concerns which students might have including concerns specific to female students in education was compiled, based on Gustafson (1980), Women's Re-entry Project (1980), and others. Four categories of concern were included: course work difficulties, faculty attitudes, institutional policies and services, and personal issues.

Demographic Data

The questionnaire collected data regarding the S's income, their religious affiliation and degree of participation, their employment and marital status, and number of children. The S's GPA's were provided by the Graduate School of Education's office of student advising.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to determine distributional characteristics of the demographic data, and the list of concerns.

S's were divided into two age categories, 24 and under or 25 and older, and two categories of religion, LDS or non LDS. Items on the list of concerns which showed the greatest separation by age category were grouped together to form the "concerns" variable (see Table 2, items 7, 13, 14, 21).

Two-way analysis of variance were run (age X religion) for each of the dependent variables (institutional climate: yes, services are provided; institutional services: no, services are not provided; and concerns).

In addition, three-way analysis of variance and co-variance were run including the modifier variable, assertiveness (age X religion X assertiveness) for each of the dependent variables. A two-way analysis of variance (age X religion) was run on the modifier variable, assertiveness.

Results

A profile of the female undergraduates in teacher education was compiled and is presented by age and religion in Table 1. As Table 1 indicates, there are some interesting differences among the four groups:

Income. Among traditional age students, more LDS students come from families with income of over $25,000. More returning students than traditional age students come from higher income families. Religion is not a factor. This difference may not take in to account the younger students' access to family support due to the wording of the question, "What is the income level of your immediate family?"

Degree of Religious Participation. Regardless of age, LDS students are much more likely to be active in their church than non-LDS students. Sixty four percent of returning non-LDS students are not active participants in a religion.

Employment. A larger percent of traditional age students work (71%) than returning students (46%), but more returning students (14%) work full time.

Marital Status. Sixty-four percent of returning women are married, compared to 40 percent of traditional age students.

Children. No traditional age students have more than two children. Among returning students, 52 percent of returning LDS women have families of 3 to 7 children.

GPA. There are no significant differences in GPA among the four groups.

Thus the typical returning LDS student is quite similar to other returning students. Most are married, with family incomes of over $15,000 and they may work full or part time. LDS returning students differ from non-LDS returning students in a much higher amount of participation in their church and a larger number of children.

Check list of Concerns. A list of possible problems or concerns is given in Table 2 No significant differences by religion for items checked was found. However, when age was considered, items 7, 13, 14 and 21 were of greater concern to returning students (need for flexible class schedule, child care problems, need for credit for experiental learning and need for part time students' financial aid).

An analysis of variance was performed using these 4 items of concern by age. A level of significance beyond the .001 level was found (see Table 3 and 4), indicating that returning female students do report concerns unique to their situation.).

Institutional Climate. No significant differences by age or by religion were found on a score composed of "yes, services are available" responses. However, when the scores for "no, services are not available" were computed, significantly more returning students perceived that fewer services were available (see Table 3 and 4). Returning students perceive significantly fewer services available to meet their needs and reported that they confront institutional policies which limit their access to higher education.

Assertiveness. None of the analysis which included assertivenss as an independent variable were significant. However, when an analysis of variance (age X religion) was run with assertiveness as a dependent variable, the main effect for religion reached a significance level of .078. While this level of significance exceeds the .05 level, it is worth noting as a tendency away from the hypothesis stated earlier. The mean of all subjects was 75, a score well below the mid point (90) of a scale running from a low score of 30 (non-assertive and not comfortable with assertive behavior) to a high of 150 (very assertive, always comfortable with assertive behavior). The scores ranged from 38 to 111.

Discussion

This study indicates that returning female students in the Graduate School of Education at the Unviersity of Utah face barriers of financial hardship, and conflicts about personal issues. Over a third work full or part time in addition to family pressures for these students. The heavy involvement of LDS returning students in religious activities and family size, ranging from four to seven children, reflect a unique characteristic of lifestyle for a large state university campus. Returning students report a set of problems unique to their situation: need for financial assistance for part time students, flexible class scheduling, child care,credit for experiential learning, etc. In addition, returning students have many of the same problems that traiditonal age students have: a strong need for career guicance, better time management and study skills.

Few of the students, regardless of age group, reported a concern about faculty role models or faculty who discriminate against them because of age or sex. This may be a function of the sensitivity of the faculty or the fact that in the Graduate School of Education, where the faculty ratio is 19

females to 66 males, there are more female faculty in the elementary teacher education program than in other divisions.

Also, undergraduates may not be experienced enough to recognize subtle sexism. As documented by Hall (1982), faculty often exhibit a subtle sexism and ageism by interrupting women and older students more often, expecting less work from them, ignoring them in class, etc. Such faculty behavior is one of the chief causes for the attrition rate of women undergraduates, according to Hall (1982). When students develop collegiality and begin to "compare notes" on thier faculty, as do graduate students, their pooled knowledge helps them locate the source of their discomfort outside themselves. Undergraduate women might need some systematic help in learning to recognize such behavior before they become discouraged and drop out of higher education or decide to abandon their goal of an advanced degree.

Returning students, regardless of religious affiliation, indicate a significantly higher degree of dissatisfaction with the institutional climate, as was predicted. It is clear that they perceive an institution with policies and services geared to accommodate a traditional student population with fewer work and family demands on their time -- a student body which is rapidly becoming a minority.

Assertiveness was not a factor in limiting or predicting the expression of dissatisfaction with institutional climate by returning women. In contrast to our prediction, LDS students tended to be more assertive, regardless of age.

One explanation for this tendency may be the roles assigned to women in LDS culture. In a culture with a public expectation that the role of women is primarily family care, and in the work force only if necessary, only the more assertive women will seek careers of any sort. A decision to have a career is a break from the prescribed norm. The choice of career may be an adaptive compromise which allows the woman to attend to family needs while developing her own career needs. The process would select for assertive LDS women.

Recommendations

Returning students perceive the institutional climate as having fewer services and policies which meet their unique needs. The combination of age specific concerns and a perception of fewer institutional services is a clear indication that the institution is not adequately serving the majority of its

undergraduate female students in the Graduate School of Education. Assuming that institutions of higher education will assess their economic future as dependent upon returning female students and that the barriers to access to higher education identified by these students should be removed, the following recommendations seem appropriate.

1. Financial aid policies which provide assistance to part time students who are in degree programs.
2. Institutional recognition of child care needs through on-campus facilities, a referral office or other programatic measures.
3. Institutional policies which acknowledge experiential learning and include evaluation and crediting procedures.
4. Departmental attention to the need for flexible class scheduling.
5. Workshops which focus on recognition of subtle sexism.
6. Undergraduate student activities which build collegiality and assist with network development.
7. Assertiveness training specifically for prospective teachers.
8. Career guidance workshops which explore career paths open to educators both within and outside the schools.
9. Assistance in organizing returning undergraduate student associations which can impact student government and lobby for policy changes that reflect the interests of this growing population of students.
10. Seminars for faculty and administrators which sensitize them to the needs of returning students and help them become aware of thier own subtle sex and age biases.

The above recommendations require a willingness on the part of institutions of higher education to acknowledge the problems confronting returning students, and to work creatively to develop innovative solutions. This is a difficult but necessary task. Institutions of higher education which survive and are viable in the year 2000 will be the ones which serve that student constituancy predicted to be predominant, the returning students.

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Table 1

Demographic Data by Age and Religion

	Traditional Age Students (under 25 years)		Returning Students 25 years or over	
	L.D.S.	Non L.D.S.	L.D.S.	Non L.D.S.
Total: 80	22 (27.5)*	10 (12.5)	25 (31.4)	23 (28.8)
Income				
15000 or less	5 (6.2)	4 (5.0)	8 (10.0)	3 (3.8)
15000 - 25000	5 (6.2)	3 (3.8)	4 (5.0)	6 (7.5)
25000 - more	11 (13.8)	3 (3.8)	10 (12.5)	13 (16.3)
Degree of Participation in Religion				
Inactive (includes "no religion")	2 (2.5)	4 (5.0)	2 (2.5)	14 (17.5)
Moderate	2 (2.5)	3 (3.8)	7 (8.8)	4 (5.0)
Very Active	18 (22.5)	3 (3.8)	16 (20.0)	4 (5.0)
Employment				
Fulltime	1 (1.3)		3 (3.8)	5 (6.2)
Part time	13 (16.3)	9 (11.3)	10 (12.5)	9 (11.3)
Not for pay	8 (10.0)	1 (1.3)	11 (13.8)	9 (11.3)
Marital Status				
Married	6 (7.5)	3 (3.8)	17 (21.3)	20 (.25)
Single	16 (20.0)	7 (8.8)	3 (3.8)	3 (3.8)
Widowed			2 (2.5)	
Divorced			3 (3.8)	
# of Children				
0	18 (22.0)	10 (12.5)	4 (5.0)	6 (7.5)
1 - 2	4 (5.0)		8 (10.0)	13 (16.3)
3 - 5			9 (11.3)	4 (5.0)
6 - 7			4 (5.0)	
GPA	3.25	3.28	3.28	3.30

*Percent of total

TABLE 2

Checklist of Concerns Showing % of Subjects who Checked items

% of Total Subjects	% Trad Age Students	% Returning Students		Items
30%	34%	24%	1	difficulty of coursework
70	63	64	2	too little time for coursework
46	56	33	3	too little contact and guidance from faculty
5	6	3	4	faculty who discriminate against me bacause of age
5	6	3	5	faculty who don't treat me as a serious student
11	6	10	6	lack of family support
48	31	53	7	need for flexible class schedule
46	47	40	8	need for financial aid
1	0	1	9	because of my age, some instructors have lower coursework expectations from me
1	0	1	10	because of my sex, some instructors have lower coursework expectations from me
6	0	9	11	lack of college admissions policies which consider adult students
60	66	48	12	classes scheduled at times when I must be at work or at home
14	0	21	13	difficulty finding adequate child care
33	16	40	14	no credit hours given for my experiential learning
34	28	33	15	no sutdent lounge or informal meeting area
34	34	29	16	no time to form colleagial relationships with other students
5	0	7	17	too few women faculty role models
32	38	26	18	too little access to student advising
59	56	45	19	lack of information about career paths in education
60	66	50	20	lack of information about career development for educators outside of school settings
27	13	33	21	lack of scholarship and financial aid for part-time students
21	19	21	22	need for access to personal counselling
13	9	12	23	lack of refresher courses in math, composition, study skills, etc..

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21	19	21	22	need for access to personal counselling
13	9	12	23	lack of refresher courses in math, composition, study skills, etc..

Table 3

Analysis of Variance of Institutional Climate, Concerns and Assertiveness by Age (A) and Religion (B)

		Institutional Climate (no)		Concerns		Assertiveness	
Source	df	MS	f	MS	f	MS	f
A Age	1	663.610	6.675**	21.409	20.423*	7.749	.853
B Religion	1	30.391	.306	.047	.044	719.597	3.19+
AB	1	10.753	.108	.099	.095	548.870	2.43
Within Group	76	99.415		1.048		225.693	

*P < .01
**P < .05
+P < .10

Table 4

Means of Institutional Climate Dissatisfaction, Concerns, and Assertiveness by Age and Religion of Students

		LDS	NON-LDS
Institutional Climate (No Services)	24 years and under	11.77	11.50
	25 years and over	18.32	16.48
Concerns	24 years and under	79.50	75.96
	25 years and over	66.20	73.87
Assertiveness	24 years and under	.55	.40
	25 years and over	1.56	1.57

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